



# ELSAH HISTORY

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## Historic Elsie Foundation Marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: A Retrospective, 1971-2021

Welcome, *Elsah History* readers, to the first of a two-part series celebrating Historic Elsie Foundation's golden anniversary! The moment invites us to recall, reflect on and appreciate what's been accomplished thus far to preserve Elsie's unique character -- and to consider thoughtfully how we manage the legacy going forward.



Like memory, a retrospective is

Inge Mack and friends holding up and "straightening" Farleys prior to renovations, c. 1993.  
Reprint from *An Elsie Album, The Restoration of Farleys Music Hall*, 1996.

necessarily selective, and we recognize that our collective story is far more complex than what can be captured here. Nevertheless, we hope you will savor these "snapshots" of the dynamic symbiosis of people and place in our beloved Elsie, as seen through the lens of the Foundation's activities over the last 50 years.

We tip our hats to the esteemed initiators of Historic Elsie Foundation -- Principia College

Professors Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., first president, and Paul O. Williams, first vice president and publications editor. In the same breath, we honor Inge Mack, HEF's first executive director, as well as the hundreds of dedicated volunteers and generous donors who have rolled up their sleeves to do the job of historic preservation in Elsie in their time.

A heartfelt thank you to all!

## Remembering Paul O. Williams: Writer, Poet, Teacher

### Paul O. Williams — A Tribute

(From EH #27, April 1979, excerpts)

[Paul Williams'] work with the publications of the Foundation has been a principal reason for the success of the whole preservation effort in Elsah. This service has been rendered unselfishly, and it has meant a great sacrifice in time and energy. Any of our fortunate long-time members can see for themselves by the simple act of reviewing the 26 issues of the newsletter that Paul produced.

The breadth of his interest is proven by the range of topics covered between 1971 and 1978: floods, Indian artifacts, birds, recipes, geodes, genealogy, interviews, country schools, archeology, early settlers, Notchcliff...

Paul's dedication to the cause of local history led him to offer courses at Principia College that required the students to read old newspapers and interview some of Elsah's citizens. His perseverance as a teacher and editor led to the publication of a number of student research projects in the newsletter...

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to know Paul during the 18 years that he has been back in Elsah (he was a student here from 1952 to 1956) realize that his public service has extended in many directions. He has been a member of the fire department for many years and completed several terms on the Village Board. Recently he has devoted more than a year to the installation of exhibits in the Village of Elsah Museum.

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### Paul, the poet

Here on the Elsah Bluffs the Sun is Softly Warm  
by Paul O. Williams

The gnats whirl in an incoherent dance.  
A plane from Lambert Field rises toward  
Chicago.  
A black ant taps my leg with his feelers.  
The throaty mumbling of power boats below  
Moves toward the marina at Portage des Sioux.  
A tow boat hoots and then hoots again.  
The high rock outcrop absorbs the sun.  
So do I.  
We are not doing anything.

(Used by permission of Anne Chadwick Williams.)

*"I was certainly aware of my father's preservation work when I was a child, especially his photographing and video recording the village."  
- Anne Chadwick Williams*

*Ever the preservationist, 30 years after HEF's birth, Paul sent in this humorous, untitled poem of his with a contribution to the Farley Music Hall Roof Fund. (From EH #97, spr. 2009)*

If you need a roof  
I will not remain aloof  
for it would be a pain  
to let in all the rain,  
on such a special place,  
yes, it would be disgrace,  
and mould would grow apace,  
and rot would come, and mice,  
then beetles, spiders, lice,  
and other kinds of horror  
with time (that great marrer),  
yes, the roof must be renewed  
before all becomes unglued  
Farley's must stay in prime  
and stand the test of time.



## **Hands-on Elsah Archeology with Paul Williams: A Student Perspective**

By John Williams

*John Williams, President of Principia College, is a former HEF president. These recollections are from John's student days at the College.*

Paul was a highly committed amateur archaeologist. Each fall and spring, he would walk the fields of Principia, as the rains washed the recently tilled fields. He would collect chert, the bits of stone chipped from larger stone when local First Peoples sat in camps "flintknapping," making arrowheads, spear heads or other points. He would then mark the locations, determining campsites by the density of the collection of chert.

Paul organized students into research teams and taught us rudimentary skills. For example, I was part of a team that transcribed the diaries of

William McNair, one of the McNair brothers. To ensure accuracy, we transcribed and read them back page after page, in different pairs.

I was assigned the task of measuring the dimensions of the Maybeck-designed gas station in Elsah. I recall being sprawled on the roof of the building, just above the center beam, calling down dimensions to a scribe.

Another task I was given, with a partner, was to slither through the mud (cold December day) and measure the dimensions of the railroad tunnel just below the Elsah Cemetery. As I recollect, it was 205 ft. deep, and pushing 8 feet high toward its deep end. The tunnel has since silted in. Given the nature of the rock, the location, and the dimensions, which would never fit an engine or any train cars, we concluded that the tunnel was never intended to serve a train. Rather, it was simply part of Jay Gould's scheme to convince investors of the reality of his threat to build a bridge at Elsah, hence driving down the value of the Eads Bridge company (which Gould later bought). The quick construction of the shoo-fly (cut into the hillside along the creek) appears to confirm the interpretation that the tunnel was theater, not serious construction.

At another point, working with the Hosmers, we climbed into the crawl space under the McNair house with the Felch murals and "dove for debris." Disused wells and outhouses have been rich locations to find everyday household debris. I was lowered, head first, into the well under the house, with spotlights above me, to dip into the cold water and grab what I could, mostly broken dishes and bottles, some flatware.

Paul was very protective of native American artifacts and sites. His archaeology informed the later writing of several of his science fiction books, set upon the bluffs between the rivers.

## Remembering Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. and the Early Days of HEF:

### Interview with Jeralyn Hosmer Lewitz



*Highly respected in the historic preservation field, Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. brought his expertise to both his HEF presidency (1971-1993) and his Advisor role on the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council (1972-1976). His seminal works are *Presence of the Past: The History of the Historic Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg* (1965) and *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949* (1981). We are fortunate to hear his story through the following account given by his wife.*

*This interview was conducted by Donna J. DeWeese on October 26, 2021, in Jeri's kitchen, over homemade squash soup. Jeri lives in the original red-brick McNair home she shared with Chuck and their children Kathryn and Jonathan.*

#### Before HEF

JHL: A Garden Club predated the Foundation. It started in May of 1964 with a handful of enthusiastic women from the village and

Principia College who had an interest in vegetable and flower gardens. I was an active member, serving as Program Chairman. Representatives met with the Village Mayor, Doug Hake, who approved of our starting a Civic Program. That developed into work on the Village Hall, starting with the club's budget of \$25! In March of 1966, we discussed combining with another group interested in preserving the historic buildings of Elsah and so began our "Historic Elsah Garden Club" -- with accomplishments!

We held summer house tours, charging \$1.50 for tickets. We raised funds to support the publication of the Hosmer/Williams' *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook*. We began annual potluck Christmas parties in the Village Hall, paying for turkeys roasted by the Principia Food Service Dept. We supported Glenn Felch's student project of historic paintings of Elsah. We successfully objected to a Village Board/Central Illinois Public Service proposal to remove all large trees in the village. We continued with Village Hall improvements. We started a series



of Mother's Day house tours. And we solicited new members, with membership set at \$2/individual, or \$3/family.

### **How HEF came to be**

JHL: Early in 1971, in February, a small group met, still using the name Historic Elsah, with Charles Hosmer, Paul Williams and Inge Mack at the helm. They knew they could not claim tax exemption until they were legally recognized as a foundation. Principia President David Andrews appointed Cyrus Bunting, Sr., to represent Prin, and he even offered the assistance of Prin lawyers, at no charge. Real organization began in April at a meeting in Inge's home. Present were: Dr. Paul Williams, Mrs. Inge Mack, Mrs. Jo Copeland, Dr. Charles Hosmer, Mrs. Alma Barnes, and Mrs. Barbara Swett. The August minutes state that the Executive Committee unanimously accepted the Articles of Incorporation as "... issued on June 16, 1971 by... the State of Illinois and recorded on June 21, 1971... The issuance of the certificate has officially started the corporate existence of Historic Elsah Foundation."

The group also accepted the By-laws and slate of officers: President – Dr. Charles Hosmer, Vice President – Dr. Paul Williams, a secretary and assistant secretary, and a treasurer.

HEF entered into a lease agreement for the Village Hall. They opened checking and savings



accounts at the State Bank of Jerseyville, filed an official tax exemption form with the IRS, and appointed Paul as publications editor. In October they hired Inge as Executive Director and then began serious work on the Village Hall by straightening the building – at a \$10,000 estimated cost for all repairs! Fund-raising became a vital assignment.

### **Jeri's story**

JHL: I was born in Dayton, OH, where my dad had always lived. The family -- six of us by then -- moved east to the Boston area, where my mother had grown up.

It was not long before Dad found a job in Manchester, NH, and we moved to a small neighboring town called Goffstown. When my sister and I were baby-sitting age, we helped care for the four children of our local Congregational minister, Ted Clapp. His wife, Eleanor, had graduated from a coed college in the Midwest called Principia, and Rev. Clapp told us that it would be nice if we could go there and meet some young men very different from those we had known in the public school. That was where, early in my sophomore year, I met and dated a senior, Charles Hosmer. He graduated and spent two years in the Army, while I finished at Prin. We married in 1955.

In 1984 when our children were somewhat "out of the nest," I opened a consignment shop called "Jeremiah's" (a name my mother had called me at times) on the second floor of the Mott Building, renting from HEF, the owner. On the first floor was the extremely popular Elsah Landing Restaurant. I sold HEF publications



along with consignment items. My store lasted there for many years until “The Landing” moved to Grafton and My Just Desserts purchased the Mott Building.

Chuck Hosmer passed in 1993. I then married retired Col. Edward Lewitz, a neighbor we had known for many years. Ed acquired the vacant former Keller Store, next door to Mott, and “Jeremiah’s” settled in there. In August of 2010, an adventurous couple wanting to open a small restaurant asked to rent the front room and kitchen. I agreed and “Jeremiah’s” retreated into the back room. Though the LaSalle Street Bakery was popular for a time, it closed in less than a year. Ed passed in 2011, and I closed my shop on Dec. 31 – after serving the community for 27 years. For the past five years I’ve been working closely with some others on a campaign to “Save Eliestoun!” Will this ever stop?

### **Chuck’s story**

JHL: Chuck was from Alexandria VA, though he had attended public schools in Washington DC. Among other activities, he enjoyed sketching the doorways of old homes in Alexandria and in Portsmouth NH and Williamsburg VA. We married after he finished his term with the Army and lived on Long Island NY. There we both taught public school and did graduate work in New York City. Chuck achieved his doctorate at Columbia University, completing a thesis on “Old Houses in America.” He later developed that into two books on historic preservation in the US.

In 1961 Chuck accepted a position teaching American history at Principia College. We built a house near the campus and eventually

had two children, Kathryn and Jonathan. By then, Chuck had shown a great interest in the village of Elsah and co-authored with Dr. Paul O. Williams *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook* in 1967. He helped establish Historic Elsah Foundation and served as president from 1971 to 1993. In 1972 we bought (over the phone, with Inge Mack’s help) a two-story brick house (ca. 1858) at 66 Mill Street.

Chuck was also enthusiastic about the structures on the College campus designed by Bernard Maybeck, and the earlier estate called Eliestoun. In 1973 he succeeded in listing Elsah on the National Register of Historic Places and, 20 years later, Principia College as a National Historic Landmark. Over many years we led adult study groups to England and the continent.

### **Founding members and early activities**

JHL: Besides those at the first meeting (April 1971), there was Edith Belote, Cyrus Bunting, Pat Farmer, Genie Keller, June Cronin and Barbara Robertson. They all had dedication, love of community, humility, sincerity, helpfulness, endurance, honesty, cooperativeness.



**Kathryn  
Hosmer  
Thompson  
on her  
father:**



Dad approached everything he loved the same way: he just enjoyed it thoroughly and didn't push it on anyone! He would talk about his passions, but only if invited to do so. He worked so hard and cared from the bottom of his heart about historic homes and districts and the people who saved them, but he never once preached to us kids about it. His contagious enthusiasm made us curious what the big deal was, so we would join tours out of curiosity. Each time I chose to nap in the car I would regret it later when I heard what I had missed.

One of my favorite examples is that our whole family toured every mansion that was open to the public in Newport, RI, multiple times because of the enticing gift the local historical society promised of four free wine glasses, and we didn't even drink wine! Then we had to transport them all home in an overloaded VW van without breaking them.

It was a FUN childhood. And — thanks to Mom's continued invitations — the fun continues! For me, standing inside a preserved historic home feeds my soul in a special way that nothing else can. It is the closest you can get to time travel, and only truly time-worn homes and buildings have that wonderful feeling.  
Thank you, Dad.

The first activity was restoration of the Village Hall. The Christmas parties held there, which continued under HEF, exemplified a genuine community spirit. At one of these, each table had decorations from other lands. Sometimes there was also a Holiday Walk, with prizes for the best decorated homes. And in warm months we'd sponsor a Flower Mart, with vendors and pony rides for children, followed by a potluck supper.

### **Genesis of village guidebook**

JHL: Charles was interested in buildings, their history, development, changes, and preservation. Paul was more concerned with people. The combination worked, and they began intense research for *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook*. Donations towards publication of the project were needed and sought. The Alton Daughters of the American Revolution offered \$500, Eddie Keller donated \$100, an anonymous woman gave \$100, and Genie Keller's aunt matched what others put in. The entire proceeds from the 1967 Garden Tour were added to the effort. In September 1967 the guidebook appeared, and the first edition quickly sold out.

### **Impact of having ringside seat**

JHL: It fired me up!

### **Early accomplishments**

JHL: Three come right to mind.

Inge and Al Mack's Elsah Landing Restaurant in the Mott Building is one. It provided not only a great restaurant for the area but also rent for HEF. Inge was like a big sister to me. One year Chuck and I and Al and Inge drove upriver for a day's outing. We stopped at a small restaurant and had a delicious, simple lunch, and Inge said, "You know, Elsah needs something like this." She and Al then dug into the idea of starting a



Chuck could do research on the estate. The house had 100 rooms that had been removed, and thus saved, from old houses that were to be torn down. One had a stairway similar to ours – and a mural. We thought, “Why don’t we try that?” Glenn Felch was a dear friend and so we commissioned him to do a mural of Elsah. He and Chuck spent the whole fall planning what each wall would display, upstairs and downstairs. The mural is a never-ending joy and treasure to me!

*(Note: See Elsah History #61 for Felch interview and #113 for color photos.)*

restaurant. They and their son Eric became an active presence at Elsah Landing.

Another example is Bob Connell working successfully to reject the destruction of all large trees in the village! In January of 1969, many Historic Elsah Garden Club members expressed their disapproval of that idea and passed a motion made by Ed Lewitz, recommending that the Village Board hold a public hearing on the matter before making a decision.

Another accomplishment was that even though Paul Williams and Chuck Hosmer were teaching full-time at Principia College, they were able to establish the Foundation and create the Guidebook. In Charles’ humble manner, he said this: “Paul and I were members of the Garden Club back in the 1960s. Paul would write the handouts for house tours. He got me interested. I wouldn’t have done [the Guidebook] without him -- it was Paul’s doing.”

### **Felch mural of Elsah in Hosmer home**

JHL: One summer our family spent a month renting a house at Winterthur in Delaware, so

### **Hopes for HEF’s and Elsah’s future**

Others have put it well. These quotations embody my hopes for the future:

-- “Elsah... has survived intact with very little fuss, to become a part of the present without becoming either self-conscious or touristy... There is that typical small-town hospitality in which no one is a stranger for more than a few minutes.” (1979 newspaper article, source uncertain)

-- “In the bustle of today’s world, one of the special features which Elsah offers its residents and visitors is the visual image of a quiet 19th century village... Elsah is unique because it is a live-in village.” (“The Village of Elsah,” source uncertain)

-- “It remains to be seen if we can keep the village of Elsah intact without turning it into a museum or a suburb devoid of any real sense of character.” (Hosmer/Williams)

*Photographs were generously provided by Jeralyn Hosmer Lewitz.*

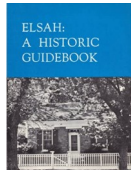


## Historic Elsay Foundation: A Timeline

**1965** - Great River Road from Alton to Grafton removes Elsay from “isolation,” spurring change.

**1966+** - Garden Club evolves into Historic Elsay Garden Club. Popular house tours offered.

**1967** - *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook* by Hosmer & Williams is first published.



**1971** – Recording of HEF’s Articles of Incorporation. Village Hall is leased at \$1/yr in exchange for interior and exterior restoration. Issue #1 of *Elsah History* is published.

**1972** - First HEF house tour; 1,370 tickets sold. First HEF “leaflet” published: a reprint of Principia Pilot’s 1971 “Maybeck issue.”



**1973** - National Register of Historic Places listing of Elsay Historic District. HEF begins restoration of exterior façade of Village Hall, first step in multi-year renovation. Superflood” (crest 33 ft.) damages many Elsay buildings.

**1976** - HEF purchases Mott Commercial Building and leases it to Elsay Landing restaurant.

**1980** - HEF opens Visitors Center in Village Hall.



**1983** - Restoration of Mott Building begins.

**1986** - 5th edition of *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook* published. HEF sponsors expert study of local zoning ordinances and Village updates them.

**1990s** - (early) - HEF ends lease of Village Hall.

**1993** - “Great flood,” worst on record (crest: 38 ft.), causes extensive damage to Elsay buildings. HEF buys Farley’s Music Hall and begins to restore it to 19th c. appearance. Principia College is designated a National Historic Landmark due to Maybeck architecture.



**2000** - HEF sells Mott Building. HEF & Village jointly operate Elsay Museum in Village Hall through Museum Advisory Committee. First annual HEF/ Museum Photography Exhibit.



**2001** - December “Home for the Holidays” (new iteration of house tours) begins.

**2009** - HEF puts new roof on Farley Music Hall.

**2012** - HEF buys Ice House Ruin via donation. Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series begins.



**2014** - HEF stabilizes walls of Ice House Ruin and installs on-site historic marker.

**2015** – [www.historicelsah.org](http://www.historicelsah.org) replaces previous website.

**2019** – Major flood (crest: 35 ft.) damages Farley’s.

*Dates cited are sourced from past issues of Elsay History compiled by the editor.*

## Back in the Day: Growing Up in Elsah

### Interview with Bruce Robertson

*George Provenzano conducted this interview on October 19, 2021.*

Bruce Robertson and his wife JJ (Janet Johnson) Robertson are retired and live in Godfrey, Illinois.

Bruce, oldest son of Forbes and Barbara Robertson, lived in Elsah Village from December 1959 until mid-1974. Bruce was 10 years old when his family arrived in Elsah. He attended grade school in the Village and lived at home until graduating from Principia College in May 1971.

Bruce resided in the Village for a few years thereafter, living in an apartment in the 'barn' behind the home of his Uncle Al and Aunt Inge Mack on Palm Street. In addition to the Macks and their sons Eric and Glen, Bruce's grandparents, Percival and Gladys Robertson, and Fred and Mary Mack, also lived in the village during these years.

Bruce was born in Butte, Montana, and lived there and in Washington State as a little boy. As a youngster, he and his family made several visits to his Robertson grandparents when they lived in a house in the woods on Principia's campus.

For two years beginning in September 1957, Bruce and his family lived in Brazil, where Forbes Robertson worked for Petrobras, the Brazilian national oil company. In the summer of 1959, Forbes Robertson had accepted a position as professor of geology at Principia College, and the Robertsons moved from Brazil to Elsah, going around the world in the process.

Bruce recalled his family's trip from Brazil to Elsah as follows: "In late September 1959, my parents, older sister Nolen Joyce, younger brother Jim, and I traveled by boat, east to west, from Brazil. Along the way, we went ashore in Argentina, South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan and arrived in San Francisco in December. We took a cross-country train from San Francisco to St. Louis where Uncle Al Mack met us and drove us to Elsah. We stayed with the Macks through the Christmas



season until our house was ready to move into. Our furniture and household goods arrived in Elsah on the Dinky."

The Macks had also recently moved to Elsah from Connecticut. They lived in the large stone house on Mill Street across from the Buggy Shop. Bruce well remembered his family's first Christmas Eve with his Aunt Inge. She had come from Holland where the tradition was to trim a large, natural Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. Aunt Inge always lit the tree, usually a Norwegian or Fraser fir, with real candles and decorated with garlands of little Dutch flags. Once the candles were all lit, she turned down the lights and enjoyed the tree's magical appearance.

Bruce recalled one rather startling experience from his first day in Elsah. "It had snowed overnight. Glen Mack, who is my age, and I went outside to build a snowman. Some of Glen's 'friends' from the Village greeted us with a snowball fight and promptly washed our faces

with snow. I suppose they wanted to find out what the ‘new kid on the block’ was made of.”

The Robertsons moved into the old stone house, now called the Keller-Taetz House, next to Farley Music Hall on Mill Street. There was a white picket fence out front along the sidewalk and a well-shaded screened-in porch on the side. Both are gone now. The barn with the antique shop that stands between Farley Music Hall and his home was built after the family moved to Elsah Hills in 1972.

On school days, Bruce walked less than fifty yards to Elsah Village School. The old stone school was built by General James Semple in 1857. When Bruce attended, the school had eight grades but only two teachers. First through fourth met in one room in the new red brick addition, and fifth through eighth grades met on the second floor in the old stone schoolhouse—where the Elsah mayor’s office is today.

Bruce continued, “There were five students in fifth grade, but I don’t remember any in sixth or seventh. My classmates included Rosemary Cronin, Aaron Darr and Glen Mack. There were only twenty students in the entire school.

“After school and on summer days, we played baseball and football in the empty lot at the bottom of Prin Hill at the corner of Mill Street and the road going up to Principia College. There were plenty of boys for pick-up games: five Darr boys, the Cronin boys, Mark Hake, Johnny Thompson. In the summer, some of us played on a Little League team from Dow, the Dow Colts.

“From seventh grade on, I went to Principia Upper School in Town and Country, Missouri. The school bus stopped at the bottom of Prin Hill. During the week, I stayed in Town and Country with a Principia family who had college-age children staying with my family in Elsah while attending college. Our parents worked out these reciprocal exchange relationships to save money and reduce the drudgery of long school bus rides.

“One of my fondest memories of growing up in Elsah occurred when my best friend’s father introduced us to water skiing. He had purchased a discarded ski boat with a big hole in the bow and three 35-horsepower, outboard motors that were in complete disrepair. A cabinet maker by trade, he was also handy in repairing anything mechanical. He patched the hole in the boat and

scavenged enough good parts from the three motors to put together one that ran well enough to pull us kids on skis through the water. This kind of resourcefulness in scraping together something useful from cast-offs was typical of many who lived in Elsah at that time.”

Bruce didn’t remember the founding of Historic Elsah Foundation, but he did participate in a restoration of the Buggy Shop on Mill Street. Bruce’s father purchased the Buggy Shop and used the basement as a warehouse for geological

specimens (rocks) that he collected from all over the globe. Bruce and his brother Jim worked for their dad, breaking up the larger chunks of rock into smaller pieces for class-room use. Bruce’s dad assembled the rock specimens into



collections that illustrated important geological phenomena and sold them to universities.

“After graduating from Principia, I created a small apartment on the second floor of the Buggy Shop. In 1974, a fire destroyed the interior of the building. As part of our efforts to repair the fire damage, my brother and I removed the board and batten siding, numbering each board in the process. After we completely gutted and rebuilt the building’s interior, we replaced the original exterior boards back into their original locations.”

*Photographs graciously provided by Bruce Robertson.*

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## Interview with Terri Darr

*George Provenzano conducted this interview on October 26, 2021.*

Terri née Cronin Darr and her husband Mark Darr live in Godfrey, Illinois. They are co-owners of Federal Steel & Erection Co. in East Alton.

Terri grew up in Elsah Village in the 1960s and 70s. Her memories of coming of age in a somewhat isolated, quaint, Mississippi riverfront town are full of warmth and happiness.



Terri is the fifth of nine children born to June and Bob Cronin. The Cronin parents raised Terri, her two older sisters and six brothers in the cozy, white frame house with large front porch at the

far north end of the Village where Mill Street forks into Elsah and Cemetery Roads. Terri’s youngest brother, Tom, resides there today.

The Cronin children attended Elsah Village School where two teachers provided instruction for eight grades: one for first through fourth; and one for fifth through eighth. Terri attended until the school closed in 1970. After that, she went to Dow for grade school and Jerseyville for high school.

Mrs. Clarinda Seago, who spent her entire career teaching Elsah School’s four lower grades, was Terri’s favorite teacher. Mrs. Seago inspired her students to be excited about learning. One of her favorite ways to do so was to accompany her pupils on afternoon field trips, up the steep hill and into the woods behind the Methodist Church. There she asked them to search for different specimens: rocks, leaves, plants, insects, etc., that illustrated nature’s processes.

Fall and winter were the best times in the school year. Halloween was especially memorable. Everyone dressed up in home-made costumes. Trick-or-treaters gathered near the river, got organized into groups according to age, and proceeded to go door-to-door through the entire Village with adults guiding the way. The residents of many homes were also dressed as frightful ghouls and hooligans and tried to give the children a good scare along with a treat.

When trick-or-treating was finished, the revelers assembled at Farley Music Hall. There was apple-bobbing, a promenade around the hall, and awards for the scariest and most creative costumes.

Winter brought colder weather and the prospect of snow and ice storms. A few inches of snow on the Methodist Church hill made for fast downhill sledding. Sliding head-first was best as long as



one avoided hitting the large tree in the middle of the slope. Ice storms often brought power outages and coatings of ice thick enough to ice-skate on Village streets.

One of Terri's earliest memories was feeling the warmth from a large wood-burning, pot-bellied stove in Grandmother Violet Rister's living room. Grandmother Rister lived next to Elsay School in the house at 57 Mill St. Terri visited her grandmother nearly every day after school, expecting to enjoy some cookies and other baked treats from the Village Inn. The sweets were one of the perks Terri's grandmother received from the Inn where she worked.

Terri's Elsay roots are very deep. Both parents were born and lived their entire lives in the Village. Growing up, Terri's paternal grandmother, Netty Cronin, and several Cronin aunts and uncles also lived in Elsay within walking distance of one another. Compared to most of us, Terri's daily experiences of interacting with three generations of family living in the same town of fewer than 400 people were remarkable, to say the least.

In the early 1970s, June and Bob Cronin were early and enthusiastic supporters of placing the Elsay Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places, the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. They regarded HEF's quest to be the first organization to list an entire town on the register to be especially significant and a point of pride for



Elsah. Elsay Historic District was added to the National Register in 1973, just seven years after Congress established the Register and the process for adding properties to it.

June Cronin worked on HEF's application for historical preservation status. She attended organizational meetings and paid particular attention to how Elsay's Zoning Ordinance would be modified to facilitate historic preservation of Elsay's homes and buildings. She was concerned villagers who wanted to remodel their homes might not welcome

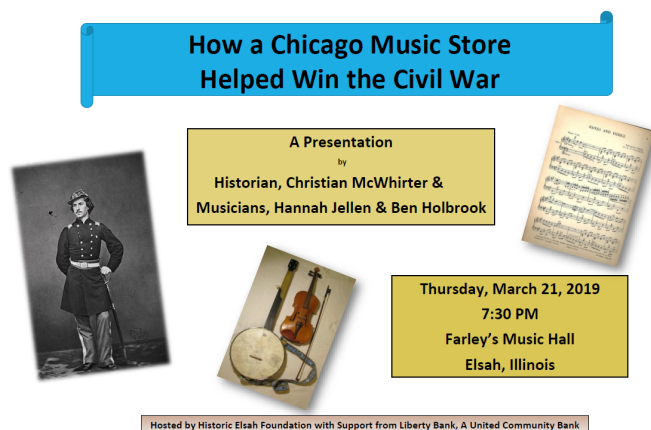
the restrictions of historic zoning. She was instrumental in persuading those who were hesitant that the benefits of preservation exceeded its limitations.

Since the Elsay Historic District was created, the Cronin parents and their children have engaged in several restoration projects in Elsay. In 1978, June and Bob Cronin rolled-up their sleeves to restore the Mott-Cronin House, the frame house with mansard roof and wrap-around porch located at 87 Mill Street. In recent years, Terri's brother, John, rehabbed the Reed-Cresswell Home at 70 Mill Street. In 2013, Terri and her husband Mark Darr joined Jeralyn Hosmer Lewitz and HEF in making substantial donations of time, property and money in a most successful effort to stabilize, preserve and provide an historic marker at the Ice House Ruin that stands at the entrance to the Village.

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*Photographs graciously provided by Terri Darr.*

## History of Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series



A little over ten years ago, Tim Tomlinson, who was then president of Historic Elsah Foundation, came up with the idea of naming the occasional lectures that were then the centerpiece of HEF's educational program as the Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series. Tim wanted to give the HEF educational presentations more cohesion and recognition and increase their frequency to four a year. Thus they became an organized annual series worthy of attracting sponsorship. Tim also sought to commemorate the singular achievements of Charles Hosmer and Paul Williams in placing the Elsah Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

From 2012 to 2017, Tim developed the scope of the Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series, recruiting historians, preservationists, re-enactors and musicians to enlighten and entertain audiences in Farley Music Hall. These presentations were and continue to be free and open to the public.

Tim also organized a network of media outlets to publicize each lecture, and he obtained a steady source of annual support from Liberty Bank: A United Community Bank in Godfrey, Illinois. In 2018, Tim turned the job over to George Provenzano, a current HEF board member.

In recent years, some of the more memorable Hosmer-Williams Lectures have been:

June 22, 2014: Nationally known enactor and historian Brian "Fox" Ellis came ashore from a steamboat in Grafton as John James Audubon, America's foremost 19th century naturalist to speak on "Audubon in early Illinois."

June 7, 2015: Historian and storyteller Barry Cloyd presented in song and narration The Drummer Boy of Shiloh, an American Civil War story from the perspective of Joseph Henry Monroe, who at age 12 was the youngest drummer boy to enlist in the war effort.

March 21, 2019: "How a Chicago Music Store Helped Win the Civil War," in which historian Christian McWhirter, from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, accompanied by fiddler Hannah Jellen and banjo player Ben Holbrook, performed popular songs which provided high-spirited entertainment at the battle front and at home.

November 12, 2020: Ian Patrick Hunt, Chief of Acquisitions, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, spoke on "Rediscovering Lincoln's Bible – A Gift from the Ladies of the Philadelphia Volunteer Hospital Association." Hunt discussed his experiences in the discovery, acquisition, and transportation of the Lincoln Bible from the donors in San Francisco to the Presidential Museum.

Building occupancy restrictions for COVID have resulted in the temporary suspension of the Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series in Farley Music Hall. HEF intends to resume them in mid-2022.

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*Written by George Provenzano.*

## **HEF NEWS**

### **Elsah Holiday Walk Saturday, December 4, 12 to 4 pm. Join us!**

An afternoon stroll through the historic streets of Elsah on a crisp December day, with village shops, homes, streetlamps and bridges charmingly decorated for the holiday season... Carolers singing, music playing, and fire pits for warmth and cheer. These are the sights and sounds of the Holiday Walk. It's FREE with reserved tickets at [www.historicelsah.org](http://www.historicelsah.org) or picked up at Elsah Civic Center, 51 Mill Street, the day of the event.

For the second year, Historic Elsah Foundation has had to cancel its traditional December fundraiser, Elsah's Home for the Holidays House Tour, due to the pandemic. Hoping to maintain the holiday spirit in the Village, HEF is offering this event as an alternative. Although no homes

will be open, visitors will be able to enter four historic buildings -- the two-room Schoolhouse, Farley's Music Hall, the Elsah Museum, and the Elsah Methodist Church. Hosts will share historic



information at each stop. Elsah's unique shops and two lovely bed & breakfast inns will be open too, serving cookies and other treats. Holiday music will be performed in the Village's two churches. \*Masks required inside buildings.

**Anniversary donations appreciated - \$50 for 50.** For 50 years, Historic Elsah Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, has worked for the enhancement and preservation of Elsah's homes, buildings, architecture, culture and environment. HEF is largely dependent on proceeds from fundraisers and donations to finance its activities. So, whether you're able to come to the Holiday Walk or not, please consider making a special donation of any size this anniversary year at [www.historicelsah.org](http://www.historicelsah.org), in-person on the 4th, or by check to: Historic Elsah Foundation, P.O. Box 117, Elsah, IL 62028.

### **Photographers, is your "Elsah Postcard" in?**

That's the theme for the Village of Elsah Museum's 2022 Photography Exhibit. Amateur and professional photographers alike are eligible. You may submit from now to March 7. See rules





at <http://escapetoelsah.com> under Events. The Exhibit runs April 2-7, 2022, in the museum building, 26 LaSalle St. Mark your calendar for the reception on the opening day – April 2.

The Village of Elsie purchase prize, for an image taken in the valley or in the surrounding area of the village goes to one winner. The amount of the purchase prize is \$200. The exhibit has added a youth prize for photographers ages 10 to 18.

### **Update to HEF purpose statement**

The Historic Elsie Foundation Board voted on April 29, 2021, to update the organization's purpose statement as follows.

The purposes of the Historic Elsie Foundation are:

- to preserve and enhance the historic buildings, houses, architecture, culture and natural environment of the Village of Elsie, Illinois;
- to encourage historical research and publication of materials on the Village and nearby historic areas;
- to foster educational programs for the general public on the history of the Village and the larger region.

The principal change is the addition of the natural environment to the scope of HEF's preservation work, in recognition of the fact that the Village's cultural legacy and wellbeing are inextricably linked to its natural surroundings. Other changes are updated wording for digital publication, articulation of the geographical reach of each activity sphere and a format change.

### **Historic Elsie Foundation Board 2021**

#### ***Officers***

President	Donna DeWeese
Vice President	Jane Pfeifer
Secretary	Blair Smith
Treasurer	Jeff Cornelius
President Emeritus	Tim Tomlinson

#### ***Board members***

Jeff DePew  
Cecily Lee  
George Provenzano  
Melody Hauf-Belden  
Colleen Turkal  
Jonathan Hosmer  
Alley Ringhausen - Consulting Member

### **Memberships for 2022**

Student	\$25
Supporter	\$50
Patron	\$100
Founder's Circle	\$250
Benefactor	\$1000
Small Business Associate	\$100
Corporate Sponsorship	\$1000

### **Elsie History Newsletter**

*Elsie History* is published by Historic Elsie Foundation.

**Editor:** Cecily Lee

**Layout:** Melody Hauf-Belden

**Subscriptions:** A subscription to the newsletter is included with all levels of membership. (ISSN 1552-9002)

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**Happy Holidays to All!**





